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The Blossoming of Bloomingdale

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It was to little more than a wilderness they came, in the spring of 1872, after one of the coldest Alabama winters any of the Hendrix family could remember ever having experienced. The hills and fields were bathed in blossoms of wild flowers such as purple violets, wild irises, and beautiful tiger lilies growing in the wet marshlands around the Alafia River.

The aroma of flowering trees filled the fresh spring air with dogwoods, magnolias, and sweet bay trees adorning the riverbanks. Stands of thick yellow pines were found in abundance nearby. The beautiful Alafia River, its banks blanketed in crimson and white by the dogwood blossoms, was clear and full of fish "for the catchin'," and the favored delicacy, "swamp cabbage," the heart of the sabal palm, was readily
available and found in the swamplands near the river.

It was James, the family patriarch, who proclaimed in a voice so loud that even the wildlife took notice, that the Hendrix family had arrived. "This is it!" he shouted, his voice echoing over the tree tops. This beautiful valley, ablaze with all the glorious colors in nature, would be their home. And so, this land, found near the center of the beautiful state of Florida, was quite appropriately named Bloomingdale Valley.

Father James, his three sons, Reuben, Pete, and Noah, their wives, together with his daughters, their husbands, and children, were the ancestral pioneers of the many present-day Hendrix, Parrish, and Garner family members still residing in the community today. "Uncle Dan" Kelly, the much-loved uncle and husband of Lucy Hendrix Kelly, was among the adventurous group. The couple had no children of their own but children were always made welcome in their home. "Uncle Dan," who had served as an officer in the Civil War, and as an engineer, was not only married to Lucy Hendrix, but was a first cousin of Lucy’s mother, Drucilla Corley Hendrix.

"Uncle Dan" told many tales to youngsters who visited the Kelly home which is still standing near the intersection of Lithia-Pinecrest Road and Bloomingdale Avenue, being located near the northeast corner. The children also loved to play on the old cannonball which rested in "Uncle Dan’s" yard near the Kelly barn, which also held another early treasure, an old black buggy on which the children took many "pretend" trips while seated at its helm. Another relic of earlier times, remembered by older family members who spent many Sunday afternoons in homestyle church gatherings or just socializing in the Kelly couple’s spacious yard, was Aunt Lucy’s spinning wheel. The Kelly homesite then extended eastward from Miller Road to Pearson Road and fronted on Bloomingdale Avenue.

The journey, which lasted some two and one-half months, had gotten underway on February 21, 1872, with most of the family residing in Monroe and Clark counties in
Alabama, making the journey to their new home in Bloomingdale Valley. One of James’ brothers had come to Manatee County in 1870, with a brother also having moved to Polk County earlier. It would be an adventure filled with many sights along the scenic trail, as the caravan of oxen-drawn covered wagons made its way towards their Florida destination and experiences such as fording the many waters including the Conuco River, the Naricon Creek, and the Chattahoochee, Aucilla, Suwannee, Santa Fe, Hillsborough, and, finally, the Alafia River. Many sightings of bears, panthers,
and even tigers were seen as the family made its way through the many swamps and heavily wooded areas of the state.

MEET THE SEMINOLES

The hardy clan found they often had to unload their wagons and swim their teams of oxen and mules across the deep waters, also experiencing many breakdowns of their wagons, overtaxed on the long journey from Bay Minette, Alabama. A number of Indian camps were passed along the way as the party began their southward trek into the state, with Seminole Indians found at a site near a beautiful stream and waterfall east of the "old fields" known as Tallahassee.

Tales of camping on old church grounds, the many small villages passed along the way, as well as friendly folks who assisted the strangers, have been carried down through the years, and are still being related to interested modern-day family members.

When the long trek was undertaken in that spring of 1872, older children of the family were understandably too excited to ride in the ox-drawn wagons, choosing instead to run alongside the wagons which were already filled to capacity anyway. Finding Tampa too thickly settled to suit their taste, the large group travelled on to Peru, Florida, then located just south of Riverview and on the south side of the Alafia. Upon arriving in Peru, which today is known as Riverview, they stopped off not only to view this beautiful area, but also for the birth of Sally Garner Parrish. At that time, Riverview had been established only 16 years before. Several of the party ventured into Manatee County, still preferring the beauty and serenity of the Alafia and the availability of fresh game such as deer, wild hogs, turkeys, and cat squirrels. At that time, alligators were commonplace in the Alafia and upon its riverbanks and adjacent wetlands. From Peru, they had made their way by wagon trail, never straying far from the winding Alafia River, continuing eastward, until they came upon the flowering valley they would call Bloomingdale.

A CHRISTIAN MAN

Upon reaching their destination, they were satisfied that all they had heard about this beautiful valley was true, even to the friendliness of the Indians who soon became quite neighborly, advising them on many hunting and fishing techniques which the Indians had practiced for centuries before. Each family head soon selected a homestead of 160 acres with some of their deeds being signed by President Chester A. Arthur. Ulysses S. Grant had been favored as president in the popular vote cast by Floridians in the national election in 1872 with many at that time being sympathetic to the south's role in the Civil War. Five of the Hendrix party who made the wagon trip to Florida in the spring of 1872 were Civil War veterans, Noah being too young to enlist when the war broke out.

The patriarch James, who had been widowed twice prior to coming to Florida, was a Christian man who throughout his life took in a number of orphans in addition to caring for his large family. He soon found a large farm with the spring planting already having been completed by the previous owner. The sum of $900 was paid for the parcel of land which was not only large in acreage but was located on fertile soil and abundant with giant old oaks draped with Spanish moss. This farm was not far from the present Lithia-Pinecrest Road and Bloomingdale Avenue intersection, the center of the Hendrix family land holdings.
When they reached the beautiful Bloomingdale Valley, as the then-colony was first named by the Alabama family, they found a bountiful supply of wild game and food for the gathering. The area abounded with wild turkeys, and cabbage palmettos, which yielded succulent swamp cabbage, the principal diet. While the menfolk hunted and fished for food, the women literally "kept the homefires burning." It was necessary to maintain a fire in their crude huts to discourage the panthers that lurked outside, too close for comfort. Good fishing was afforded by the Alafia River and the early settlers thought nothing of walking three or four miles to catch a good "mess."

GREAT ALLIGATOR CHASE

Work on cabins was begun shortly after the family arrived and often continued late into the night. A variety of wild animals including the Florida panther lurked nearby, often eating the settlers’ pigs and chickens; deer feasted on their sweet potato crop. Panthers also screamed around their cabins at night. Other staple foods in those early days included deep purple huckleberries which grew in abundance in the area at that time and were used to make the southern delicacy, huckleberry pie. The men procured their game by "fire hunting," shining lights in the animal’s eyes, then shooting. Oftentimes they "shined" panthers instead of deer. "Uncle Dan" Kelly shot a tiger on an early hunt in the Bloomingdale area.

Noah Hendrix’s wife, Drucilla Corley Hendrix, known as "Grandma" Hendrix, this writer’s great grandmother, loved to tell of early events in the lives of her hardy family. It seems a man named McLaughlin, who lived across the Alafia River from what is now known as Lithia Springs, had heard of the abundant crops produced on the Hendrix family homesteads and wanted to visit the Hendrix settlement. Being somewhat hindered by recent flooding of the Alafia, he had to swim part of the way. Hearing a thrashing noise over his shoulder, he quickly peered around only to see a large alligator trailing him. In terror, he climbed a large palmetto tree, strapped himself to the trunk, and remained there all night until the river subsided and the alligator disappeared.

"Great-Grandma" died at the age of 95 and was buried in the Hendrix family cemetery which is now known as Bloomingdale Cemetery. She lies not far from John Carney who was murdered by the Indians 16 years prior to the arrival of the Hendrix founding family. Seems the Indians thought that John Carney was stealing their hogs. The early pioneer was plowing his fields when he was reportedly attacked and killed by a band of Indians who scalped him, Grandma related.

'CRUELLY MASSACRED'

After hearing some unusual sounds near his home, the Carney family had spent the previous night with a neighbor, John Vickers. Carney was restless the entire night. In the morning, he returned to his plowing, with Vickers hearing the sound of guns from the direction of Carney’s home. There was no sign of Carney when John Vickers arrived at the Carney homesite. Early the next morning, Captain J.T. Lesley (in whose company Carney had enlisted to fight in the Seminole Indian War of 1856), with the assistance of home guards, chased the Indians to Manatee County, killing all except one, who made his escape despite being wounded. The avenging party returned and buried the body of Carney which had been discovered some 500 yards from his plowing field. He had been shot five times.
John Carney’s wife Susan reportedly followed him in death within a year, leaving eight orphaned children.

Carney’s simple headstone reads:

"Sacred to the memory of John Carney who was born August 23, 1804, and was cruelly massacred by the Indians April 17, 1856. Here in the silent grave lies one whom no man had aught against."

This writer’s grandfather, Will Hendrix, grandson of patriarch James, often talked of obstacles the family faced in the early settling days of the Bloomingdale community. Many of these tales centered around experiences with the Indians who were plentiful in the area at that time but, for the most part, friendly and desiring to coexist with the newly arrived "white man."

He also spoke of the monumental task each individual family faced in undertaking the clearing of land parcels in 160-acre plots they had selected. They not only cleared the land of virgin timber, stands of yellow pines, and huge oaks, but stubborn scrub palmettos whose long roots anchored them deeply in place in the sandy soil. Those roots had to be "grubbed" by hand, with the younger family members piling the large thorny bushes for burning. Some of the cleared acreage was planted in orange groves.

Soon after their arrival in Bloomingdale, the family discovered that they must adapt new methods of propagation and cultivation in order to produce a crop in the sandy Florida soil. Virtually every family member was involved in the raising of food. Cattle and chickens were also raised, and wild hogs were easily found in the woods near their homes. Cane syrup was made from stalks grown on the family farm, with the juice being extracted from the pulp in an old fashioned mill which was propelled by a mule or horse.

Cutting the tall, thick, yellow pines as a source of income also occupied much of the families’ time. The timbers were hauled by oxcart to the Alafia River and floated to the Bay for sale. Some of this timber was used to build fine homes for the Hendrix clan. Noah, who at first had settled at a location near Riverview on the shores of beautiful Hutto Lake (then referred to as Noah’s Pond), constructed a handsome two-story residence on the site of the present old Asa Hendrix home.

Will recalled driving down Ybor City’s sand roads in a horsedrawn wagon with the palmettos crushing under the wagon wheels. At that time, Ybor City land could be purchased for $1 per acre. In 1899, when Will was 14 years of age, he sold sweet potatoes, cassavas, eggs, and syrup on Franklin Street in downtown Tampa. The street was a sand bed at that time. The family took the trip to Tampa by horse and buggy once a month for staple food items, raising all other food the family required except coffee and flour. A 96-pound barrel of flour sold for $5 and a side of bacon for $2. There were only three general stores in the city of Tampa.

Mail brought by boat to the Alafia Post Office was distributed once every two weeks. Service at that post office had been reinstated in 1868. Because there were no bridges at that time, whether transporting mail, supplies, or families across area lakes and rivers, the waters had to be ferried or waded.
A post office was established at Bloomingdale on August 25, 1879, continuing there until August 31, 1910. C. E. Worth was its postmaster and it was established on a site on Little Road, which today is the location of some of the finest homes in the area. Little Road was named for John Little, husband of Mary Hendrix Little. Some time after the turn of the century, the post office was moved to a site on the south side of Bloomingdale Avenue not far east of the Dan Kelly homeplace. In charge of the old Bloomingdale post office was Mrs. Cassie Garner, who is still remembered by many older residents.

"Granpa" Garner who had learned many medical techniques while serving as a medic in the Civil War, served as a community doctor. In those days, if a family member became ill and required the services of a doctor, it was necessary for someone to make the trip to Tampa, either on horseback or by horse and buggy, in order to bring the doctor to the patient. Doctors during that period were often paid with food items such as a supply of vegetables or half of a slaughtered pig or cow.

Hendrix Chapel is believed to have been located northwest of Bloomingdale and southeast of Brandon, and was probably established September 27, 1883, as early School Board minutes of Hillsborough County show John Carlton and G. W. Smith having been appointed as trustees. Reportedly, an old teacher and minister "Uncle Messa" taught school on weekdays, delivering the message from the "Good Book" on Sunday.

'STATE NORMAL SCHOOL'

The first Bloomingdale School was established September 23, 1884. "Board established it, with C. E. Worth (the town postmaster), L. W. Buchholz and Joe Bell as trustees, and was located about one mile northeast of the present Bloomingdale crossroads," on Pearson Road. This would later become the site of the county's first "state normal school," where teachers came from many Florida towns to earn their teaching credentials. Several of the Hendrix family children would number among the students preparing themselves to serve as teachers of Hillsborough County children. On that first school site, early students planted young trees which now shield the old building from the hot Florida sun. The one-room structure in recent years had been converted into a private residence and at one time housed the early Charlie Garner family.

Some of the Hendrix family children also attended Hendrix Chapel as well as receiving part of their elementary education at the first Bloomingdale School. At least one of its early schoolmasters boarded at the home of "Uncle Dan" Kelly. An early school was also located near Providence and is believed to have been called Oakridge. It and the Bloomingdale School were incorporated into the Brandon district school later. The building housed 12 grades with as many as three grades in one room. School No. 38 is believed to have been located near the old Providence Church, one of the oldest churches in the area, having been organized by Rev. Tom Jaudon in 1877. Providence School is mentioned in School Board minutes of December 8, 1888: "Petition of Providence No. 38 to use one month appropriation on building was granted." School No. 38 had a teacher as per minutes of June 1, 1881. Minutes of August 4, 1893: "Petition from Providence Settlement to establish a school was granted. School building to be erected near Providence Church." No number was listed for this school which was located between Brandon
and Riverview, and whether this is the same "Providence" area of School No. 38 earlier, is unknown.

GREAT EDUCATOR ARRIVES

Ludwig Wilhelm Buchholz, a German-born educator who immigrated to Tampa in 1880, figures prominently not only in Bloomingdale history but is also remembered for his contributions benefitting Hillsborough County and the state of Florida as well.

Professor Buchholz became County Superintendent of Schools, and conducted a normal school each summer at Bloomingdale, holding sessions in the Presbyterian Church. There, he taught teenage boys and girls, including at least three members of the community's founding family, drilling his students in the "Three R's," Psychology, and instructing them in methods of teaching.

Buchholz was born in Christfelde, West Prussia, Germany, on March 25, 1855, of "poor but honest" parents, he professed, and much of his early training included studies of the Holy Scriptures. In this way, he prepared himself for entrance into the Teachers College at Prussian Friedland. At the age of 16, he passed the exam before the County Superintendent.

He became a teacher in Germany, an accomplished musician, and while serving as an educator, became his town's tax collector. He worked so hard that his health suffered and he was diagnosed as having tuberculosis, with a recommendation that he take a sabbatical in southern Italy. With little money, and following much deliberation, he decided to go to Florida to engage in the business of orange culture, being advised by an eminent physician on the Florida climate.

February 1, 1880, he left Berlin for Florida, his ticket reading: "Bremen, Germany to Tampa, Florida."

TAMPA IN 1880

Being somewhat surprised that there were no sidewalks, no paved streets, no brick buildings, no fine residences, only simple frame houses, he was, however, impressed by the friendliness shown to him, although not understanding a word that was said. After deciding that Tampa was not the place for orange trees, he travelled to Bloomingdale, where he soon purchased the 80-acre plantation belonging to the Carney family, John Carney having been ambushed, killed, and scalped by the Indians 24 years before. Carney was buried there on the Carney Plantation. In the winter of 1883, Buchholz began soliciting the assistance of neighbors, and by the summer of 1884, the first public school in Bloomingdale was established, reportedly being the first frame school house to be erected in the county. The greatest honor ever bestowed upon him was that of being elected trustee of the school. Charles E. Worth of Bloomingdale had circulated a petition asking that the professor teach there and the petition was signed by every patron of the school.

In 1887, he received his commission as County Superintendent from Governor Perry. Soon thereafter, the teachers training school was opened in Bloomingdale; and following several years of operation, the normal school training for teachers was moved to Plant City, then to St. Petersburg, due to easier travel accessibility. From 1901 to 1905, he was a professor at the Florida State College at Tallahassee, and from 1905 to 1909, he served as dean of that college. After leaving Tampa in 1913, he became professor of education and of the Bible, at the University of Florida. Professor
Buchholz was widely recognized as one of the foremost educators of the state. He was honored by being named as an official of many teachers and educational associations in the state and the nation.

The first church in the area was a Catholic church established about 1886, not far from the Mulrennan home near Mulrennan Road and Durant Road. About 1900, the area's first Methodist church was open and was situated on a site on the west side of the present Pearson Road and Bloomingdale Avenue intersection. Early minister Rev. Meadows from Riverview served as one of the church's first pastors, reportedly often seen walking from his Riverview home to the Bloomingdale church. Noah Hendrix's son Sam was also an early Methodist minister. Soon joining the Methodist sanctuary were the Baptist and Presbyterian churches.+

**COOL LITHIA SPRINGS**

Pete Hendrix donated the first five acres for the Bloomingdale Cemetery which up until that time had been the burying place for only Hendrix family members. The first person buried in that cemetery was Artemesia Hendrix, who died in 1901 of typhoid fever, with the burial of a Hendrix infant soon thereafter.

Great-grandchildren of James Hendrix still residing in Bloomingdale today say their childhood differed little from that of their parents with the exception of the modern-day convenience, the automobile.

"Cooling off" in Lithia Springs, which was first known as McLaughlin Springs, often followed long, hot summer days spent working in the fields. The springs -- found only a couple of miles "as the crow flies," through thick brush and down a winding wagon trail across the Alafia River-continue to be a favorite recreation spot for folks living in southeastern Hillsborough County.

Mining operations which are believed to have been discontinued shortly after the turn of the century, were conducted for a time at a location about a mile upstream from Lithia Springs. During these mining operations, large bones believed to be that of early prehistoric animals were uncovered.

**ABE MAAS' GENERAL STORE**

Frances Hendrix Bridges, daughter of Will Hendrix, remembers the early Thompson store which was located at a site on the northwest corner of Lithia-Pinecrest Road and Bloomingdale Avenue. This store was operated by Mrs. Lilla Buzbee Thompson, sister of Mrs. Joe Garner.

Mrs. Bridges also recalls occasional trips to Tampa where the family shopped at Abe Maas' general store on Franklin Street. At that time, a variety of food and household items could also be purchased at the early store.

In addition to the Hendrix, Garner, and Parrish families, other families residing in Bloomingdale after the turn of the century included McLeans, Stearns, Buzbees, Quicks, and Mulrennans.

When "Grandma" Hendrix, wife of Noah, died in the nearby community of Alafia in 1947, she was 95 years of age. Her death left only one surviving member of the original colony, a nephew, A.S. Hendrix.

In 1872, Drucilla Corley Hendrix ("Grandma") was 19 years of age and was a bride of only three months, having married Noah, her third cousin, in November prior to
the family embarking on their journey to Florida, and having left behind all of the family she had known.

'SPIONEER SPIRIT'

This hardy woman, who truly possessed the "pioneer spirit," would bear 10 children, all without the aid of a doctor or midwife, losing five of her offspring to death. Her family fondly recalls that earlier 95th birthday celebration at her small, unpainted "cracker home" which drew relatives from her childhood home in Alabama as well as from many central Florida towns. Alabamans attending included "Grandma’s" sister, Angie Corley Eubanks of Bay Minette.

Those attending remember the old home, with its wooden shutters, as dark but homey and warm with its large, high front porch surrounded by a freshly "raked" white sand yard. Her tiny bedroom held stacks of patchwork quilts which she had "pieced" from the leftover scraps of material she had sewn for her family years before. The old iron cooking pots used on her "outdoor stove" in early Bloomingdale now held colorful geraniums on the old front porch. All are reminders of a lifestyle slowly yielding to history.

Today, the Hendrix family cemetery holds the earthly remains of the pioneering family who arrived in Bloomingdale over a century ago. This family cleared the land of its virgin timber, built homes, planted crops and orange groves in a land where only Indians had lived before.

Many members of the Hendrix family still reside in Bloomingdale and the southeastern Hillsborough County area.

Some still live on the property homesteaded by their pioneer forefathers who in 1872, saw Bloomingdale as an "unspoiled valley."

NOTES

Sources of reference are notes I have gathered for many years-tales told to me by my parents, grandparents and accounts of other family members, Hillsborough County School Board and Postal records; also the Florida Handbook.